

# The National Grange

Of the Order of Patrons of Husbandry

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*Building Communities*

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November 28, 2006

The Honorable Kevin J. Martin, Chairman  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12th Street SW  
Room 8-B201  
Washington, DC 20554

Re: RM-11348

The National Grange, the nation's oldest general farm and rural public interest organization, opposes the proposal made by Cyren Call for the creation of a Public Safety Broadband Trust, that would be a free give-away of portions of the 700 MHz band of spectrum. The National Grange believes that Congress has already taken the necessary action, in the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, (DRA 05) to allocate an additional 24 MHz of the 700 MHz band to first responders for interoperable communications. We strongly believe that the Cyren Call proposal would not be in the best interest of family farmers and other residents of rural communities who currently lack adequate commercial access to advanced telecommunications technologies and who currently face disruptions from the transition to digital TV broadcasting. We also believe that Cyren Call's proposal would undermine, not aid, Congress' effort to provide first responders with the timely, reliable communications systems they need, as recommended by the 9/11 Commission. As such the National Grange supports the decision by the Federal Communications Commission to dismiss Cyren Call's petition on this matter.

By including digital TV (DTV) provisions in the DRA 05, Congress set in motion a plan to advance the nation's conversion of its TV broadcast services to new digital technology. This will free up vast amounts of high-quality spectrum in the 700 MHz band, a portion of which will be made specifically available for public safety uses. This plan is entirely consistent with the recommendations made by the 9/11 Commission. The National Grange believes that the transition to DTV will be especially disruptive for rural communities that lack access to competitively priced satellite or cable television services and that continue to rely on over-the-air broadcasting to receive television programming. Nevertheless, the National Grange has

supported the DTV transition provisions of the DRA 2005, in part, because the Congress, in its wisdom, allocated a significant portion of the newly available spectrum to become available for additional commercial telecommunications applications. These new commercial applications of spectrum hold out a promise of more robust, more reliable and more consistent service coverage for rural and farming communities that are currently underserved by existing advanced telecommunications technologies.

The National Grange believes that the provision of new spectrum in DRA 05 for use by first responders is a critical step in meeting their interoperable communications needs in times of natural and manmade crises. Funds for these programs, as well as other programs to facilitate the transition to DTV, will come from the public auction of the remaining spectrum in the 700 MHz band vacated by TV broadcasters. The DRA 05 provides up to \$1.5 billion for digital set top converter box subsidies that will ease the transition to digital TV for rural consumers. An additional \$1 billion will be provided to help public safety agencies better deploy and use interoperable communications systems. Additional funds are also provided for a unified national alert system (\$156 million) and enhanced 911 services (\$43 million).

The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) will administer these grant programs. The National Grange has already opened a dialogue with NTIA to explore ways that we can use our network of nearly 2800 local and county Grange chapters across the United States to assist in implementing a public service education program in rural America to facilitate the transition to DTV in 2009. Delays in implementing the provisions of DRA 05 related to the DTV transition that might arise from further reconsideration of the Cyren Call proposal would complicate and disrupt our efforts to train and mobilize our volunteer resources in rural communities across the nation to participate in public service educational campaigns regarding the DTV transition. Other non-profit and civic organizations are preparing similar commitments of resources to assist with this transition in rural communities as well. Given the disproportionate impact that the DTV transition will have on rural communities and the clear necessity for public service educational programs to address those impacts, we believe that further delays in the implementation of the DTV transition provisions would be directly contrary to the legislative intent of the DRA 05.

The National Grange also believes that, in this instance, auctions are the right way to allocate spectrum to commercial telecommunications service providers. Auctions raise billions for the Treasury, and ensure that economic and technical value – not political favoritism – determines the highest and best use of the spectrum. The FCC's own data clearly indicates that, given reliable access to these technologies, consumers in rural areas are increasingly turning to wireless technologies to serve their communications needs. Rural consumers recognize the convenience, mobility, efficiency and

security that wireless technologies can provide. The National Grange believes that market demand for advanced telecommunications services in rural communities, coupled with appropriate discretionary oversight of commercial applications of new telecommunications technologies and services by state and federal regulatory agencies, is more likely to result in greater effective allocation of spectrum resources to serve rural and farming communities than the Public Safety Broadband Trust advocated by Cyren Call.

Under current law, this spectrum auction must occur by January 2008 but the National Grange believes that there is no compelling reason to postpone the spectrum auction until then. The sooner this auction occurs, the sooner critical public funds can be used for DTV transition programs, for enhanced investment in first responder networks and interoperability and for deficit reduction. In addition the sooner this spectrum auction occurs, the sooner that spectrum resources can be made commercially available for deployment of advanced telecommunications services in rural and farming communities.

Recently, Representative Nancy Pelosi eloquently stated the House of Representative's order of business when the Democrats gained the majority. At the top of the list was enactment of all the recommendations made by the 9/11 Commission. Another point she made was that no program shall advance if it increases the federal deficit. Implementation of the DRA 05, as written, supports both of these goals by improving public safety communications and by providing additional resources to the U.S. Treasury for deficit reduction.

In sharp contrast, Cyren Call's proposal would only advance its own interests, potentially at the expense of family farmers and rural residents who live in communities that are currently underserved by advanced telecommunications technologies and services. It would derail Congress's carefully thought-out plan and current timeline for the conversion to digital TV. It would delay the timely allocation of spectrum for public safety communications and other important public benefits.

Thank you for your consideration of the views of the National Grange in opposition to Cyren Call's proposal for a Public Safety Broadband Trust. The National Grange believes that the public interest will best be served if the FCC implements, as enacted, Congress's well-orchestrated digital TV provisions outlined in the DRA 05. These provisions will result in new commercial applications of spectrum that hold out a promise of more robust, more reliable and more consistent service coverage for rural and farming communities that are currently underserved by existing advanced telecommunications technologies.

Sincerely,

*Leroy Watson*

Leroy Watson, Legislative Director  
National Grange of the Order of Patrons of Husbandry